



THE GENERATION NEWSLETTER
Of



The 1773 - Colonial Virginia Copper Halfpenny

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Founder/Editor

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"Resolve to protect its
historic integrity and
to promote its welfare"

Of General Interest

Recently, while browsing through the Introduction of Bob Vlack's book: "Early American Coins," I came upon a statement of his, way back in 1965, that is even more true today, in the 1990's. But, it is to his credit that I would like to point out how far ahead of his time he was to have expressed this particular aspect of colonial coinage types.

Bob mentioned how "fantastically rare" any type of colonial coin was then, yet the prices were still "economically" down to earth and affordable by most collectors, because of the current lack of serious competition for the few available coins, then. How right he was, and still is, even today.

The uniqueness of this insight was that his was a voice in a wilderness. For him to have realized this point, way back then, is astounding. Obviously, not very many readers or collectors took him seriously enough, or we wouldn't be able to buy a single colonial coin today at any "reasonable" price.

Included among these American colonial coinages was the Virginia copper Halfpenny. And it remains a bargain in the market place for all interested collectors. Increased recognition may help change this feature.

MEMBERSHIPS: Unchanged

FEATURE SUBJECT

How rare are the counterstamped 1773 - Colonial Virginia copper Halfpennies?

In contrast to "countermarking" (includes: filing, scratching, digging, single crimping, double crimping, incising the edge with lettering, with symbols or both), "counterstamping" (striking a punch to inscribe a letter or symbol on either of a coin's surfaces) was most likely the standard method used by early colonial merchants to place their personal "stamp" on common copper coins to advertise their business. This was done most likely to facilitate trade, in the smaller (common) Colonial copper medium.

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Another motive for stamping copper coinage was apparently to show a stamp of approval for some pieces of accepted weight and copper content. And, this copper coinage would be accepted in trade with much greater confidence.

The most difficult specimens to rationalize as to their purpose are the single letter (or symbol) counterstamps, which were apparently the earliest form of this pastime.

And, although counterstamping was not at all that rare in our early American coinage, especially in the northern colonies (states), it seems to have been (for lack of known specific research) quite rare among the few "surviving specimens" of 1773 - Colonial Virginia copper Halfpennies.

This is not to say that at any one time there couldn't have been an abundant number of these counterstamped coins. But, we are faced with the reality of evaluating the remaining observable stock. And, for practical purposes, the term "observable" would not include any coins now located in Canada, England, or Japan. Ask any veteran collector of American copper coinage of all kinds and they will most likely say that they have indeed seen many Colonial counterstamped copper coins, but that the actual number of 1773 - Colonial Virginia copper Halfpennies seen, firsthand, (not in pictures) are so few that you might wonder if the species actually exists.

Yes, they do exist!

But, there seem to be ever so few that it would be very difficult to account for them by "type" of counterstamp. Furthermore, it could be that the same exact coin could be getting reported by several different observers since one person's period of observation could be exclusive of another's.

The uniqueness of a counterstamp tends to make any such encounter stand out in one's mind. Typically, if you reviewed 2,000,000 coins and saw only 2 counterstamped specimens, I believe you'd remember them precisely, because all the other coins would tend to blend together, for lack of distinction.

Finding such specimens can be quite interesting, even exciting, but to find a 1773 Virginia Halfpenny with any kind of countermark or counterstamp on it could be one of the most extraordinary finds of your life.

I have such a specimen, a 1773 - Colonial Virginia copper Halfpenny, counterstamped or "cross-stamped," as the case may be. I believe that I acquired this unusual counterstamped specimen from New Cumberland, PA. The Newman variety set is an "8-H," grade: "VG," with a no period Obverse and a 7-string harp Reverse. It has the letter "S" stamped deeply into the Obverse, right across the head of King George III. The "S" is not uniform, but more compressed at the top half than at the bottom half. On the Reverse, an "X" is stamped almost opposite the "S" on the Obverse.

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So, this coin was "cross-stamped," with a distinct letter on each surface, one backing somewhat to the other. Neither is on "dead center."

However, the "S" on the Obverse is upright only when its top points to 3 o'clock (straight up). This "S" goes just across the King's face, but does not cover his hair. The "X" on the Reverse is not exactly back-to-back or opposite the "S" on the Obverse, and the "X" is only 2/3's the size of the "S." Each letter is crudely struck into its own respective surface of this coin, with the "S" and the "X" both indicating the use of a cold metal punch, possibly on a stove-warmed coin, leaving excess lumps on the two opposite surfaces. The legs of this "X" are perpendicular and equal in length, much like a "+" sign in math.

The "S" struck into the Obverse shows signs of moderate wear around its edges, apparently from normal circulation, so as to pull the edges of the "S" in upon itself, slightly - - with a rounding worn effect. This "S" was struck boldly and deeply, yet the channel of its S-curve is not squared in the bottom, or even rounded. It is rather irregular, as though more than one strike had been made by this same stamp. The lumps on the Reverse that were created by the striking of the "S" are also well worn.

The smaller "X" struck on the Reverse of this same coin, likewise shows some wear but less than that of the "S" on the Obverse.

Notably, these two counterstamps were not made at the same point in time of this coin's life cycle. The "S" was struck first, because its S-curve clearly shows the impression of parts of the "X." However, the impression of the "X" is not interrupted by the shape of the "S." Thus, the "S" was produced before the "X," and I would suspect they were struck by different authors. A light scratch line along the bottom of one "X" leg reveals that the two deeply struck (opposite) impressions did not break through one another, and no "filling in" had been done. It could also be assumed that these two strikes were done by two different authors.

Counterstamp Sightings, Firsthand - - -

In order to test the waters of rarity for the possible occurrence of a counterstamped 1773 - Colonial Virginia copper Halfpenny, it seemed appropriate to take a poll of "selected individuals" within the Numismatic Community, that I might shed some light on this subject.

I've contacted a few individuals whose numismatic experience allows them to reveal a glimpse of just how rare an occurrence my counterstamped (or "cross-stamped") specimen really might be. This I did by asking each of them to review in their minds all the years that they'd been collecting or had been associated with coins and try to recall if they had ever seen a counterstamped 1773 - Colonial Virginia copper Halfpenny, firsthand. If the answer was yes, then I would follow up by asking what the exact design of their counterstamp was and especially if it was stamped on both sides.

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The following active numismatic specialists were asked: "Have you ever seen a counterstamp, consisting of either letters or symbols, on the surface of a 1773 - Colonial Virginia copper Halfpenny, firsthand?" The following list indicates the responses I got.

NAME	PASTTIME / OCCUPATION / ETC	COMMENTS	YES/ NO
Eric P. Newman	1956 ANS Monograph on "Coinage For Colonial Virginia" and his 1960's "Additions" to same. He is a much published/read author.	Hasn't seen any.	No
Q. David Bowers	Bowers & Merena Auctions. Very popular author on many current numismatic subjects; has been a pioneer in countermark research, writing & collecting of 1800's.	Hasn't seen any.	No
Robert Vlack	Veteran dealer/collector. Noted author of oldest American coins. Was an "Ace" collecting these 1773 - Va. copper Halfpennies.	Has - seen 1. Long time ago - - can't remember the actual letters.	Yes
Gregory G. Brunk	Regal countermark author of all types of coins & many countries, except Colonial American. He has recorded 22 colonial countermarks. * (Single ltr is most likely.)	Hasn't seen a VA. (w/more than 1-ltr) He hasn't gotten back to me on any with a single ltr.	No
Mike Ringo	Well known NY dealer/collector. Had 1773 Va 1/2 d counterstamp "in his hand" when I called him !! Mike is --- extremely resourceful.	Has - seen 1. This was his 1st --- and only one: (Obverse: "R.P.S")	Yes
Cory Gilliland	A lady, uniquely qualified to help us in this quest. She has worked for many years with U.S. coins and medals for Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC.	Hasn't seen any.	No
Norm Peters	A NY dealer/collector for over 35 years: early American colonial copper coins. Published material on Machins Mills. Loves research.	Has - seen 2. 1. (1976) "M.G." 2. Can't recall exact ltr's.	Yes
Jack Beymer	California dealer frequents DC/MD shows. Tremendous colonial copper resources. Widely traveled. Jack "carries" 1773 Va 1/2 d's.in stock.	Hasn't seen any.	No

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Counterstamp poll, continued ---

NAME	PASTTIME / OCCUPATION / ETC	COMMENTS	YES/ NO
Carl Carlson	Of Stack's coin auction house, has reviewed many 1773 Va 1/2 d through the years, for resale.	Hasn't seen any.	No
Glen C. Burger	Maryland dealer/collector of colonial coppers for many years.	Has - seen 1. Can't recall ltr.	Yes
Gary Trudgen	Has researched, collected and written on many state coinages for 35 years, colonials: 10 yrs.	Hasn't seen any.	No
Bill Wilkerson	Bill is a veteran dealer, right the very "heart" of 1773 va 1/2 d world: Richmond, Va. He's seen many of these gems in his time.	Hasn't seen any counterstamps.	No
Larry Marsh	A long time admirer of Eric P. Newman's works, Larry is in DC & is in a position to see many of these 1773 Va 1/2 d coins.	Hasn't seen any.	No
Keith Littlefield	Secretary, Virginia Numismatic Association and is "big" on Va. obsolete paper money. He knows many coin dealers & their stock.	Hasn't seen any.	No
Charles Hoskins	Charley worked in U.S. Treasury 20 years. Now he is "the Man" (INS-AB) that authenticates coins for Smithsonian & at local shows.	Hasn't seen any.	No
Dwayne Cantrell	Is a veteran dealer/collector of coppers & has a special interest in U.S. patterns. (Springfield, Va.)	Hasn't seen any.	No
Brainard Charlton	Veteran collector for 63 years, he has been collecting 1773 Va. 1/2 d's for many of those years in the heart of Virginia.	Hasn't seen any.	No
Jack Borckardt	Ohio veteran dealer/collector. His "Collector's Cabinet" is known for specializing in coppers.	Hasn't seen any.	No
Earl Blaisdell	Veteran coin dealer/ jeweler and coin show dealer's "coordinator." He handles 1773 Va. 1/2 d's, too.	Hasn't seen any.	No

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"Consent To Publish, Granted"

I want to thank each of the above distinguished contributors for giving me their consent to publish their responses in this Issue # 05 of our private Generation Newsletter. For any of the "published" authors, this is a very trusting thing to do. I certainly appreciate this unusual consideration.

Out of courtesy to each generous participant that is not a member of the Generation Newsletter, I have taken the liberty of furnishing a copy of this Issue # 05. Although this Newsletter is not for the consumption of the general public, I think we owe this courtesy to the lady and these gentlemen, ethically to reassure each that their comments are represented totally within proper context, and numismatically to allow each to share in any conclusions that might be developed from these combined offerings of a most unique group.

Quite frankly, without the above testimonials, this article would have been just so much -- conjecture. The value of the above positive and negative sightings are far more significant than one might first concede.

Item: The integrity of each individual's offering is paramount, without exception!

Item: The tremendous period of time that some of these veterans have covered with their reviews is awesome. We're not just saying that today alone do we not see many of these counterstamps. No!!! What we are really saying is that the sightings over many, many years of all these key numismatists is indeed far more significant than a mere sampling of the present day inventory of U.S. dealers, auction houses and museums.

Discussion Of Offerings:

It is only fitting that I began with Eric Newman's offering because of his unusual standing in the Numismatic Community on the subject of these 1773 Virginia copper Halfpennies. And while I was directly trying to confirm my own premise that counterstamped Colonial Virginia copper Halfpennies are quite rare, Eric's many, many years of reviewing these little coppers did not reveal even one such specimen. This then must be a strong indication of the way we're most likely headed in the long run. We shall see.

Next, Q. David Bowers recalled that he hasn't actually seen such a 1773 Colonial Virginia copper Halfpenny counterstamp. This surprised me, for I would have thought that he would have come across at least one or two during all his years in coins and all the wonderful private collections that he has auctioned off. Again, this says a lot to me. They just weren't there to see.

Both of these offerings are very powerful and positive contributions. This is clearly an initial indication of the rarity of these unique specimens.

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Discussion Of Offerings, cont'd

However, Bob Vlack did not catch me totally by surprise when he told me that he had indeed seen a counterstamped 1773 Colonial Virginia copper Half-penny, a long time ago. I can imagine that with all the Colonial coins that he has seen through the years, that there could easily have been several of these counterstamps lurking within the many estate appraisals he rendered. There are so many of these privately held, recluse-like managed collections hidden away from the outside world that only see the "glimpse" of light of day, when someone like Bob gains access to even the Colonial portion, for an expert opinion of current value and apparent authenticity. Then he sees a lot that we never would. For they may never go on sale, publicly, but may be held further by a family member. Hence, Bob's rare find is extremely important to this inquiry. It is truly unfortunate that the letters have not come to mind. As it would be nice to locate this specimen, later.

This group would not be complete without the presence of Gregory Brunk. Although I've not been in close touch with him recently, I will want to finish up this area of the l-letter possible counterstamps with him. These are extremely important and actually the most probable, in my mind. Perhaps we'll see more on this aspect, later. I can think of no one else, that would have a greater library of experience in this exact area than Gregory.

He did mention to me (and I do not consider this to be anything of a confidence, as much as a conclusion well within the public awareness) that the reason that there apparently hasn't been any books done on this exact area is precisely that there do not appear to be many "examples" available to support this earliest phase of countermarking or counterstamping.

I, of course, agreed on the apparent extreme rarity aspect, but to me that aspect alone verifies both the need to get started uncovering more of these earliest, original samples of this art form in the American colonies and the need to begin recording these earliest samples. Furthermore, all of the Colonial issues could be approached as a collection, not just the Virginia Halfpennies. Now, we did not have a difference of opinion, here.

But, what does exist between our two viewpoints is a perception of the classifying of examples of the different countermarks. In his past books he gained insight by being able to "identify" the probable or exact source of recurring countermarks. This is preferred, of course. However, the obvious handicap of doing so with "single letter" counterstamps would be very haphazard, at best, especially with only a handful of specimens to go around.

For me, I would appreciate just a review of the few existing samples known and the methods used to produce our earliest (oldest) and perhaps our rarest specimens. And later, as more evidence becomes available to us, an update could be done to analyze the possible source of recurring samples and the reason for their production, as well. Maybe, by the year 2000. In the mean time, we need to start somewhere. This is virgin turf. Could there be some surprises, here? Only the inquisitive will ever know.

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Discussion Of Offerings, cont'd

It now becomes my pleasure to relate the essence of Mike Ringo's one sighting. Not only did he surprise me by having an example in his very hand when I called him, but it turned out to be in excellent condition. So, I made the acquisition - - - through him - - - and now, the "R.P.S" is my latest addition. A copy of both the Obverse and Reverse are enclosed on page 14. I feel that this single sighting is very significant because of the multiple letters, with "periods" would not be my perception of a typical Colonial Virginia author's work but rather a probable "cross-currency" brand of counterstamp. Occuring possibly later on in the late 1780's or 1790's, the inhabitants of one of the New England colonies counterstamped this outsider coinage (in excellent condition and of long use life in trade) to represent their image. Obviously, this would certainly support the claims that Virginia Halfpennies were well accepted throughout the colonies as stable currency. This is a most interesting case. Confirmation may be available through examining the other counterstamps on all colonial coins other than those of Virginia.

Now, we come to someone that I felt was in an unusual position in the Smithsonian, in Washington, DC. Cory was the most likely one to have the public come forward with unusual examples of coins that they might feel were rare or different in some way and want to know if the Smithsonian expert had ever seen anything like them before. Therefore, I was dismayed when I found that she never had an occasion to see even one 1773 Virginia counterstamp. I'm referring to the general public, not people who have collected coins for years. Why wouldn't they come and ask? I know what that feeling's like --- to wonder if you have found something very unusual. And, I went over to the Smithsonian --- but that's another story.

The importance of this negative sighting is that it indicates that there must not be all that many of these rare types "out there." What better source than the Smithsonian, to test the waters of the world of those who are not coin-oriented? Imagine the surprise and curiosity of someone who finds a copper coin in an old trunk in the attic, or tucked away neatly in the spine of an old family book, or found deep down in --- an old country water well. "Let's take it to the Smithsonian!" Dream on.

This was an important "other source" to be covered and I think that I can speak for all of us who have benefited from Cory's contribution to this inquiry, when I say thank you and perhaps you'll be able to join us again.

This next sighting is also special. Norm Peters has seen two of these rare counterstamped Virginia halfpennies. He's one of those New Yorkers that keeps records of all those things he either finds in research or comes across in trade. Such was the case in 1976 when he sold a 1773 Virginia copper Halfpenny to someone and it had an "M.G." counterstamped on it. Furthermore, these letters were inside an outline that was the shape of a movie ticket: rectangular and indented on all four corners. This outline was also "serrated" inside, all the way around. Norm says that he feels confident that this was a design used frequently by silversmiths when placing their counterstamps on New England coinages, and not rare at all.

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FEATURE SUBJECT, Cont'd ---

Discussion Of Offerings, cont'd

Except that, this time the silversmith's "mark" appeared on a 1773 Virginia copper Halfpenny and that "is" rare, any way you look at it. And, once again we are confronted with a paradox. Is this another example of "cross-currency" counterstamping? Is this another New England usage of the popular and well circulated 1773 Virginia copper coinage finding more than subtle acceptance in trade? The silversmith was accustomed to putting his craftsmanship in only the "best," into silverworks. And here, with his "M.G.," the smith entrusted the integrity of his name, his business and successful advertising in the future, on this --- this outsider, this 1773 Virginia copper. "Outstanding!" Norm, this is a real find. Confirmation of this smith's "mark" should not be hard to establish on other coinages.

As we encounter more of these multiple letter counterstamps, it may become much easier to assess their relationship with other coinages and the counterstamps found on other colonial (state) coinages. Unfortunately, Norm forgot to write down the counterstamp on the second sighting. It just may have been so well worn that he never really determined "what" it was. Or, maybe it will come to him one day. With there being so few sighted, every one is very important. Perhaps hypnosis --- nah.

Jack Beymer is a vital link in this chain of observers. And although he hasn't seen a counterstamped 1773 Virginia copper halfpenny, to date, he serves as an important lighthouse for our counterstamp "watch." Jack travels a great deal, sees a lot of coins. He constantly gets new 1773 Virginia Halfpennies and carries them in stock, regularly.

The very fact that Jack hasn't seen one of these rare beauties is indicative of the national scope of the lack of these counterstamps. He visits the Wash., DC / Maryland coin shows and sees both sides of the West coast/ East coast coin world. No sightings, in all the years that he has been in coins! This is a strong indication of there being very few in existence. Jack's negative sighting fits the rarity theory.

Carl Carlson has been in a position, at Stack's Coins, to see many, many of the 1773 Virginia coppers, yet he says that he has not seen one that has been counterstamped. This again, seems to be a very strong indication of the overall shortage. Stack's sees a lot of these 1773 Virginia Halfpennies and this negative sighting fits the rarity theory.

Glen Burger has joined the Generation Newsletter group some what more recently than most and yet he had mentioned on his original questionnaire that he had, indeed, seen a counterstamped 1773 Virginia Halfpenny, years ago. He couldn't remember the exact letter or letters, but he did see it firsthand.

These actual sightings with unknown letters are a bit of a problem, because the unidentified "blanks" could be the very same 1773 counterstamp just going around from person to person. In fact, that might seem to be the likely case: a counterstamp "on the move" could be making the rounds, over the years. So, the answer is: time is on our side. We'll find 'em.

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Discussion Of Offerings, cont'd

The remainder of all our contributors had negative sightings and are mentioned in more detail because of who they are and what they do and how that fact makes their observations important to our inquiry.

Gary Trudgen, one of our very first Generation Newsletter members, has researched and dug through a lot of colonial coppers for the past 10 years. During all those years, to have never seen, or even not to have been shown one by someone who did find one, is indicative of their rarity.

Bill Wilkerson's many years as a dealer in Richmond makes him the perfect reference for sighting this particular rarity. He sees many of these 1773 Virginia Halfpennies, some have just been excavated by someone using a metal detector to locate them. The condition may not be all that great, but what is important is whether or not it was counterstamped. And yet, even located in the heart of the Virginia Commonwealth and very close to colonial Williamsburg, he has never seen a single counterstamp.

Larry Marsh has been reviewing coins for many years. Like myself, he is another Eric Newman disciple. He has found several old Virginia coppers for me, has seen many himself, but not a single Virginia counterstamp.

Keith Littlefield, in his overview position as Secretary of the VNA, could have seen such a rare specimen as a counterstamped Virginia Halfpenny, with his knowledge of many a dealer's stock, but he hasn't.

Charlie Hoskins reviews a lot of coins, mostly U.S. coinage, as that is what most "normal" people collect at coin shows. But he does venture into the colonial American coinages and looks for counterfeits in all walks of numismatics. It occurred to me that an oddity such as an interesting looking coin as a counterstamped 1773 Virginia Halfpenny could have very easily been brought to his attention for examination or just a friendly: "Have you ever seen anything like that?" No such luck!

Both Dwayne Cantrell and Earl Blaisdell are local northern Virginians with extensive dealer/collector experience that could have easily led to a sighting of a 1773 Virginia counterstamp, but no such luck.

Brainard Charlton lives down in a quiet little town in Virginia, but he has led a very active life in collecting almost everything in coins. He has collected 1773 Virginia's for quite some time, but says he hasn't ever seen a counterstamped one. With all the people he has dealt with over the past 63 years of coin collecting he could have easily have caught sight of just one. But that was not the case.

Jack Borckardt could have very easily seen one of these counterstamped Virginia Halfpennies, because he has dealt in coppers for many years. But as chance would have it, not one ever turned up over the years for him.

And so, this concludes specific references. Next comes a tally of our honest efforts and some plausible conclusions for posterity.

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The Tally

It is extremely important to reiterate the extraordinary impact that all of the negative sightings have had on my personal perception of this yet to be established estimate of the number of Virginia counterstamps in existence and available for our finding and our analysis.

From the observations represented here by our group of 20, my tally shows that 5 of us actually "had seen," firsthand, a 1773 counterstamped Virginia copper Halfpenny, on our own, and long before I ever revealed my cross-stamped (S/x) one to some of the group, after the poll. This means that a total of 7 sightings, but only 6 possible coins were involved. The "R.P.S" counterstamp was counted twice, quite correctly, once for each of two different observers. This happens when a specimen changes hands during a polling period --- which took many months.

But, --- only "3" distinct counterstamps emerged out of all of this exhaustive inquiry: 1 apparently Virginia-oriented (S/x) and 2 possible New England-oriented "cross-currency" type counterstamps with multiple letters.

Only 1 truly Virginia-oriented Halfpenny counterstamp !!! This would be extraordinary, if true, especially at this late date, some 35 years after Eric's 1956 book trumpeted the arrival of these mysterious, die variety driven, and romantic old American Colonial coppers.

As you have probably figured out by now, there are two types of winners and no losers in this inquiry. If your contribution was that of a positive sighting, you are one of a very exclusive few who have experienced that high privilege. And you helped to verify that 1773 Colonial Virginia Halfpenny counterstamps actually do exist.

On the other hand, if you've never had a positive sighting, yet --- your experience helps to fortify and confirm the theory that these Virginia counterstamps are very rare and seen by only a very few lucky people.

Above, I used the term "had seen" to refer to sightings of Virginia counterstamps within the inquiry period, because I later had occasion to show my crossed-stamped (S/x) specimen to some of the participants, later on. They were: Cory Gilliland, Charley Hoskins (at Baltimore coin show), Keith Littlefield, Bill Wilkerson, Glen Burger, and I believe also --- Dwayne Cantrell. So, now they too have seen one, firsthand, all be it the same one. But it (S/x) is quite different.

It has proven impossible to Xerox (copy) this cross-stamped specimen. However, at the very last moment I've managed to get someone to photograph both sides and I've included a set on page 14. I think that the contrast is exceptional, given the rather dark brown color of the coin.

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Conclusions on The Counterstamp Inquiry

(Positive Sightings)

First, the positive sightings are very important because they show us that these Virginia counterstamped specimens actually exist.

Furthermore, there seem to be two major types of Colonial Virginia counterstamps: the "1 letter" and the "multiple letter" ones. These latter suggest an interrelationship between the Virginia coinage and all the other colonial coinages, especially New England's.

Obviously, other American colonists besides the Virginians practiced counterstamping of the Virginia coinage.

We will probably find that these counterstampings occurred at dates even after 1792 and the emergence of the U.S. coinage production.

(Negative Sightings)

This is the strongest indication that we face a tremendous obstacle in trying to turn up these rare survivors, especially in a short time.

For the negative offerings, I can only conclude that over all these years of combined experience, with so very few counterstamps seen, that the rarity theory is right on target. These Virginia counterstamps are very, very rare indeed. I have a gut feeling that there may not be more than 30 of the truly Virginia-oriented counterstamps surviving, today.

A Personal Insight

Most significantly of all, I think we have made a very representative sampling. That is not to say that this is literally representative of the entire 1773 - Colonial Virginia copper Halfpenny population --- no. But it is from such key players in the Numismatic Community. Who better to get a sampling from? And while someone else may want to attempt to cover a much wider sampling, fine, have at it, but I am comfortable with what we have so far, for now. But, yes --- we will always want more conclusive evidence until we feel we know "exactly what is out there."

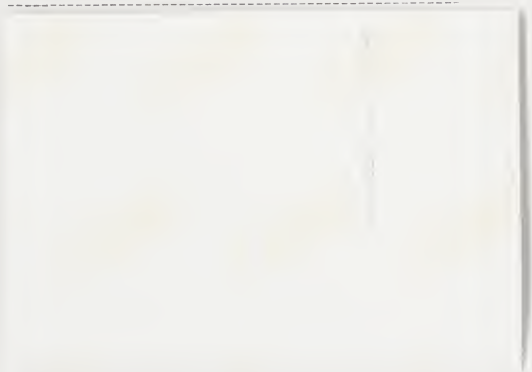
Variety Sets and Counterstamps ???

While 1773 Virginia Halfpenny counterstamps in themselves constitute a form of specialized variety, is there any reason to attribute any additional importance to which Newman variety set hosts a 1773 Virginia counterstamp? The answer to this question is a matter of "gravity." Using Eric Newman's table of rarity: 1 to 8, with 8 as the highest, we can attribute the highest degree of additional influence on a counterstamp's value in direct relationship to the rarity level of the host variety set, just a matter of gravity.

Single Letter "Cross-stamped" Counterstamp

On

The 1773 - Colonial Virginia Copper Halfpenny



(Enlarged)

VERY RARE COUNTERSTAMP : "S" / "x"

(Obverse and Reverse)

Newman Variety Set: 8-H

This specimen is the property of William N. Veach. This the only specimen of a 1773 Virginia Halfpenny counterstamp of this type known to this author, with the two single letter stamps --- one on each opposite surface. Close examination suggests that this specimen is very possibly a true Virginia-oriented counterstamp. Each letter is quite crudely imposed upon its respective surface. The "S" came first, apparently --- as the "x" interrupts the form of the "S," but the "x" is uninterrupted and appears to show much less wear around the edges of the "x" itself. Very possibly, two different authors struck these simple letters, apparently by primitive tools and methods. They are a far cry from the refined, almost elegant counterstamps of the New England brand, with their artistic multiple letters, often complete with periods and delicately designed sharp serifs, indicative of larger townships and urban trade centers.

Single Letter "Cross-stamped" Counterstamp

On

The 1773 - Colonial Virginia Copper Halfpenny



This s
This t
type k
each o
very p
crudel
--- as
and ap
Very p
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c multiple

letters, often complete with periods and delicately designed sharp serifs, indicative of larger townships and urban trade centers.

Multiple Letter Counterstamp

On

The 1773 - Colonial Virginia Copper Halfpenny



(Enlarged)

RARE COUNTERSTAMP: "R.P.S"

(Obverse, only)

Newman Variety Set: 23-Q

This specimen is the property of William N. Veach.

The multiple letter counterstamp (w/periods) would suggest that this was a sample of "cross-currency" counterstamping --- where the Virginia Halfpenny was utilized by an inhabitant (businessman) within another colony (state), instead of their own local sovereign coinage. Although this practice may have been common among other (New England) coinages, it seems out of place for the Virginia coins, especially with King George III on the Obverse! Finding this exact same counterstamp on other coinages may help to "date" this occurrence and perhaps identify where "R.P.S" resided. Time will tell.

THE GENERATION NEWSLETTER

FEATURE SUBJECT, Cont'd ---

* * * * * Establishing A New "Permanent Register" * * * * *

For Virginia Counterstamps

It appears that a concerted effort will be required to track down the previously sighted "blank" Virginia Halfpenny counterstamps, without any advertising, and determine their place in the scheme of things. Right now, we need more data, a lot more firsthand sightings. Therefore, I've decided to establish a PERMANENT REGISTER OF 1773 VIRGINIA HALFPENNY COUNTERSTAMPS.

This "Permanent Register" will record the following information about the respective firsthand sightings:

- a. The observer reporting the sighting, the date, location, grade, and apparent Newman variety set of the host coin.
- b. A description of the exact counterstamp, Obv., Rev., or both.
- c. A photo or Xerox copy of the coin being reported.
- d. The current owner of the counterstamp. (& prev. owner, if avail.)

This Permanent Register should be available to anyone who wants it for the mere cost of postage. Only the ownership data would be withheld.

If an acquisition was desired, the parties could go through me until the owner wanted to deal direct. This would protect the privacy of all owners and block any harassment by obsessed buyers.

Explaining The "Cross Hair" Point Position

Now, I will continue to make inquiries and if I find instances where I have "identical" stamps described by different sources, then I will want to further investigate (later) to see if the "sightings" were of the same coin that one owner was showing around to many people just to get their reaction (of its rarity) or if, in fact, the sightings were of totally different coins. In this later case it could very easily be that the "same" letter(s) would be stamped on opposite sides, or that the stampings are not positioned precisely in the exact same "cross hair" point position.

The cross hair point position of the "S" on the Obverse of my coin would be: ---- "(Top of letter points to) At 3 o'clock Obv., "S" axis is: $x = +7/64$ ths of an inch and $y = 0$." Or, "3 o'clock Obv., $x = +7$, $y = 0$." And, you'd know exactly where my "S" was located on the Obverse of my coin.

What this means is that the letter "S" points toward the 3 o'clock position, when the coin is placed so that the normal design's top/center point would be at the 12 o'clock position. Consequently, the "S" would then appear to be sideways, with its top pointing to 3 o'clock. The "x" axis (horizontal) is off center by $7/64$ ths of an inch, while the "y" axis runs right through the center of the "S," at the point. See page 16 for an illustration.

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COUNTERSTAMPS, Cont'd ---

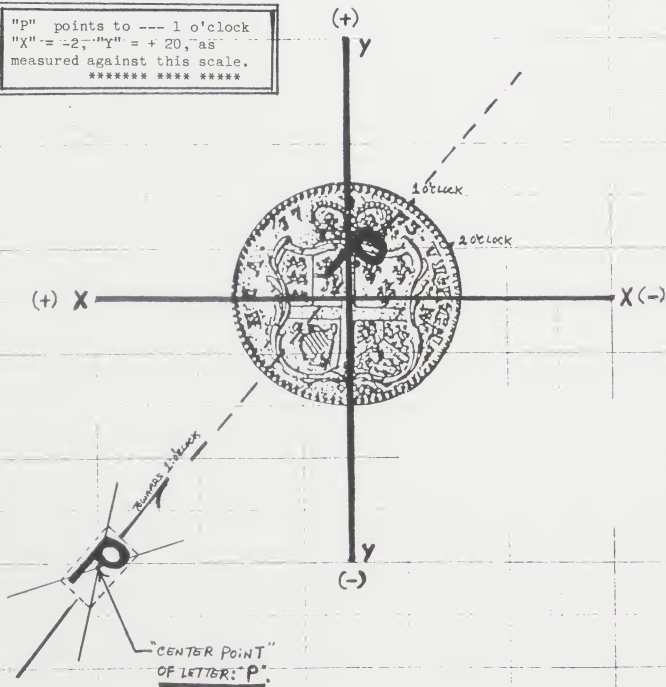
30 June 1991

*** THE "CROSS HAIR" POINT POSITION ***
(By: W. N. Veach)

Measured: in 64 ths of an inch

Scale: 3 times normal

"p" points to --- 1 o'clock
"X" = -2, "Y" = +20, as
measured against this scale.



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FEATURE SUBJECT, Cont'd ---

Questions To Ask Oneself

*** If we wanted to ask any questions, I would like to have inquired:

1. How many 1773 Virginia counterstamps (totally) might there be, today?
2. Who was the counterstamper, normally, what position in the community did he have?
3. For what reasons did he counterstamp these coins?
4. Before the Melting Pot, how many counterstamps would a merchant create?
5. Since my counterstamped coin is a VG grade, I wonder if I might assume that most (if not all) of these counterstamps were accomplished on coins already well circulated, and not on "AU" or uncirculated grades?
6. What was the likely affect of the "Melting Pot" on any such counterstamps that existed prior to 1789? (50%, 80% ?) Since these coins were in very frequent circulation, they were most easily subject to being sequestered for elimination.

Since no author has seen fit to address counterstamping for the period of Colonial American coinage in any of their numismatic books, I shall have to entertain some observations and conjectures of my own, the absolute truth about which may never be known.

Most likely, the reason for this is that the subject, itself, is not compatible to ordinary analysis of the objective type, but rather prone to the subjective experience of a very few who actually have these very rare personalized pieces. Additionally, it would probably take many years of the most intricate research of old letters and manuscripts to uncover absolute evidence that these counterstamps were actually created by merchants or tradesmen in Virginia, proper, as opposed to being counterstamped in some northern colony (state).

That is to say, commitment to this subject "exclusively" would be rather unjustified. However, a continuous, ongoing, accumulation of all the current and any new information, at one central point would lead to an eventual works by somebody, someday. We all need this matter resolved, in order to know better where we stand when we are confronted with a 1773 counterstamped Colonial Virginia copper Halfpenny.

Some Possible Answers To Oneself

In point number 1. (of 1. thru 6., above) the total that might have survived to this day is dependent most directly on both how many were created originally by each counterstamper and how many such counterstamper there were, not to mention the affect of the "Melting Pot," if applicable.

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FEATURE SUBJECT, Cont'd ---

Answers To Oneself, cont'd

To resolve these questions, one needs to address questions number 2, 3, 4, and 6, first. These questions are the foundation of the first one.

Who was the primary counterstamper? It was most likely, but not entirely, the extremely aggressive, independent local commercial tradesmen who wanted to establish an image of security and integrity for his name in trade, usually within a small distance of where he resided.

Another reason for stamping familiar images on local coinage could have been to help create a feeling of greater security and integrity in trade with any businessman in that region. In this way, the merchant could have done so to readily identify local copper specimens, that had already been determined through weighing and physical assessment, to be current and acceptable coinage. Furthermore, this personal "mark," and easily recognized stamp of approval, could give instant protection against light weight sliders and outright counterfeits from sneaking into respectable trade locally. This removed the necessity of repeatedly having to reassess a perfectly good coin, over and over, each time it changed hands.

"Aha, this is one of Jeb Garvey's pieces, over in Lynchburg. I'd know one of his anywhere. What's good 'nough for him, is good 'nough for me. I'll accept this copper in trade."

And so, a crude protective veil would have been established locally or between adjacent townships, --- and maybe some of Garvey's stamped coinage may have even reached other colonies, with equal acceptance. Thus becoming a new form of commercial advertising on the strength of the merchant's honesty and integrity.

How many coins were affected or stamped then? I would only venture to address those counterstamps that originated in Virginia in the 1770's and 1780's, prior to the Melting Pot. The whole New England aspect is another matter, entirely.

Now, it is possible --- that as few as three or four merchants may have placed their personal counterstamp on an average of --- 60 to 80 coins each, for a grand total of perhaps --- 300 affected coins. This is absolutely --- a "shot in the dark," for there does not seem to be any public documentation to assist us in this area, yet. Time will surely tell. But, at least for now we have opened this subject, and maybe someone else will pay greater attention and accumulate additional information on these Colonial Virginia counterstamps. Let's try to prove these figures "wrong," or maybe right.

Actually, if it weren't for the three specimens that we've found, this whole subject might not even exist in my mind. This is what "Ghost hunting" must feel like: no one else has seen what you seek, but you feel certain that they are out there, waiting ---for you to find them.

And, having come 3/4 circle, we finally come to the one remaining major influence on the total number of survivors existing today, the "Melting Pot."

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FEATURE SUBJECT, Cont'd ---

Answers To Oneself, cont'd

The Melting Pot

Given the assumption that any such counterstamped Virginia Halfpennies would be among the most frequently and "currently" traded specimens, would they not (all) have been extremely susceptible to being sequestered when all copper coinage fell victim to the fears of suspicion and insecurity? It might be reasonable to assume that perhaps as many as 80% of the counter-stamped coppers of Colonial Virginia (prior to 1790), while previously used the most frequently in day-to-day trade because they were readily accepted, could have been greatly consumed in the copper Melting Pot, 240 of the 300.

That would leave, "perhaps," only 60 actual Virginia-oriented specimens in 1790, of the few lettered types existing previously. But how many more, were later worn smooth or destroyed either because someone mistook a "stamp" as an indication of a counterfeit or because they were "recycled" much later to create U.S. copper coinage issue?

The Final Count ?

How many have managed to actually survive all acts of Man and Nature, in order to exist today, keeping in mind my earlier question # 5? I would estimate: less than half of the 60 remain, today. So we may be talking about 30 or fewer survivors, spread among 3 or 4 varieties. This spread would not necessarily be even, across the board for these four different lettered varieties. Hopefully, one of more of each of the few original varieties managed to survive.

Yes, we appear to have found one such survivor, my "S/x" specimen. But, how easy will it be to find another similar to it? Then again, have we really been trying? I suspect that we may find only a total of 5 of these Virginia-oriented counterstamps by the year 2000, or about 1 every 2 years --- and then, one every 10-15 years, after that, if we're lucky.

The New England Variety

This brings me to the other area of consideration: the New England counterstampings of 1773 Colonial Virginia copper Halfpennies, while they were freely circulating up North, among the sister colonies.

I can say very little about these cross-currency counterstampings. Without sample specimens to refer to for guidance, the full range of possibilities far outnumber the degrees of the compass. I think that if there is any fruit in this basket (and there is), this subject is better left to those who know the New England Colonial coppers well enough to decipher this aspect. I welcome all the assistance anyone is willing to give this area of interest, that the results may be shared by all, sooner or later. The exact conclusions drawn from any such information --- will be up to you, individually.

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FEATURE SUBJECT, Cont'd ---

A 4th of July --- Connection

It is rather fitting, on this date, to refer to the significant duty that 1773 Virginia Halfpennies served, in 1776 and many other Colonial historic dates and events. Our great, great, great, great grandfathers may have been standing there outside the walls that housed the men who signed the Declaration of Independence. They, of course, cannot be here today to tell us that they "were actually there, at that very moment" when mortal men witnessed the birth of Democracy, amid small townships and a people who were of modest means, but of great character.

However, these little copper Halfpennies --- were there, right there! They were probably being nervously twiddled in the hands of the very men who deliberated and finally signed the Declaration of Independence. They were there, at the writing and signing of the Constitution, too. In the pocket of every man in the room. Yes, they were there. And I think of this fact, every time I hold one of them in my hand. A piece of history is still available to those who want to find them.

An Overall Conclusion

I think it's important to realize at this point that we are just merely opening a new door for Colonial Virginia copper Halfpennies. And, that we will not have all the answers that we really desire, to our satisfaction, for quite some time to come.

In light of this, and in closing, I would hesitate to draw more than one overall conclusion about any counterstamped 1773 Colonial Virginia copper Halfpenny, and that is: they are probably rarer than any previously documented counterstamps, because they seem to be totally unaccounted for.

Again it has been a pleasant experience, sharing with all of you, the little aspects of the Virginia Halfpenny that make it all that more rare and unique. I welcome comments and additional information from you all and some day we must have a follow-up to examine any new and significant developments in this area.

P.S.: Hopefully the next Generation Newsletter will get away from Virginia Halfpennies and go outdoors - - - on an organized hunt - - - with metal detectors and lead by a real veteran of this kind of adventure.

Sincerely,


William N. Veach
Founder/Editor